

PRESS RELEASE

Department of Consumer Protection

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Date: April 28, 2004

143 Contractors Caught in Consumer Protection Home Improvement Sting

Unregistered home improvement contractors face criminal and administrative penalties if they ply their trade in Connecticut, Commissioner Edwin Rodriguez of the Department of Consumer Protection (DCP) said today. The Commissioner spoke at a press conference marking the conclusion of a four-month long sting operation in Enfield that caught 143 home improvement contractors who had either failed to register with the Department, or who violated other requirements of the state's Home Improvement Act.

"The law requires contractors to register and comply fully with all provisions of the Home Improvement Act," Rodriguez said. "Failure to register is a criminal offense, and we have every intention of fully enforcing this law."

The Department's Trade Practices investigators, working with the Enfield Police Department, used a home at 227 Hazard Avenue in Enfield that was provided for this purpose by the State Department of Transportation. Acting undercover, the DCP investigators contacted area contractors, including many whom the department believed were working without registrations, and invited them to bid on various projects.

Interested contractors subsequently submitted home improvement bids and contracts to the undercover investigators for painting, paving, chimney work, roofing, fence installation, landscaping, remodeling and refinishing. Of the 143 individuals in violation of State law, 63 were from Massachusetts. In all, DCP investigators identified 109 individuals who were unregistered and another 34 who were non-compliant with other aspects of the Connecticut Home Improvement Act.

The unregistered contractors face criminal charges of up to one year in jail and up to a \$2,000 fine. Those contractors who were registered but found non-compliant with other parts of the Home Improvement law are being referred to the Department's legal division for administrative review and possible sanctions.

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“Given that this is our fourth annual undercover operation, I’m frankly disappointed at the number of contractors who continue to try to skirt the law here,” Rodriguez said. “And persons coming in from out of state to perform home improvement work must also comply with Connecticut laws.” He explained that Home Improvement Contractor registration has been required by law since 1988.

“The efforts of the Department of Consumer Protection to strongly enforce the state’s contractor registration law is critical to properly educating both consumers and contractors,” according to Bill Ethier, Executive Vice President of the Home Builders Association of Connecticut. “Consumers receive the benefits of the law they deserve and contractors who comply with the law are afforded the level playing field they seek.” The Association represents both home builders and home improvement contractors in Connecticut.

“For years, home improvement issues have been the top consumer complaint in Connecticut and nationally,” Rodriguez said. “Problems that come up can cost consumers thousands of dollars. And consumers often lose a second time by having to pay another contractor to repair or to finish the job. This is why hiring only registered contractors is so important.”

Under state law, a consumer who suffers construction damage or problems as a result of work done by a *registered* contractor may qualify for some restitution from DCP’s Home Improvement Guaranty Fund, which can return up to \$15,000 in restitution.

Rodriguez also praised Enfield Police Chief Ronald G. Marcotte, Sr. for the support and efforts of the Enfield Police Department, and thanked Richard Allen of the State Department of Transportation for working to provide a house for the sting operation.

“This was a great cooperative operation between the Enfield Police Department and the Department of Consumer Protection,” Chief Marcotte said. “Detective Commander Lt. Timmerman and his staff worked as a team with DCP, and we were happy to help out in this effort. Hopefully, consumers will be alerted to the fact that contractors must be registered in Connecticut.”

Commissioner Rodriguez stressed that the Department will continue its full and strict enforcement of the Home Improvement Law in Connecticut. Consumers with questions or concerns about their home improvement contractor or contracted work may call the agency at (860) 713-6110.

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